

Establishing a Central Receiving and Shipping Point at the Largest General Support Hub in Afghanistan

BY MAJOR DONNA J. JOHNSON

During its deployment to Afghanistan, the 17th CSSB improved logistics operations at Bagram Airfield by establishing a central receiving and shipping point.

From June 2010 through May 2011, the 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) operated the class I (subsistence) and water warehouse, supply support activity (SSA), class III (bulk petroleum) fuel farm, forward arming and refueling point, retail fuel point, ammunition supply point, and central receiving and shipping point (CRSP) at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The battalion also sustained seven major hubs throughout Regional Command East (RC-East). As only the second CSSB to sustain RC-East, the 17th CSSB arrived at a critical time, when the number of forces in Afghanistan surged from less than 70,000 to nearly 100,000 troops. To sustain the surge, the 17th CSSB had to expand its operations, particularly the CRSP.

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Conditions on Arrival in Country

When we first arrived, our inland cargo transfer company (ICTC) operated the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) yard, which consisted of unit cargo containers and rolling stock. The contractors operated the central receiving point (CRP), consisting of sustainment containers for the SSA and materials for base operations.

As we became inundated with the equipment and supplies needed to support the arrival and sustainment of units deploying into the theater, we struggled with throughput at Bagram Airfield. At our peak, we had 1,273 containers in the pipeline headed for Bagram

Airfield, entering from Pakistan through Torkham Gate and from Uzbekistan through Hairaton Gate.

Backlog Issues

Initially, we were not prepared to ingate, receive, and process this volume of cargo. One of our greatest challenges was space constraints. Our RSOI and CRP yards were dispersed and filled with frustrated cargo, some of which had been there for years. Many units and various nodes at the forward operating base (FOB) did not have the space to receive and store their cargo.

The CRP's biggest customer, the SSA, received 60 percent of the containers ingated each day. As the largest SSA in Afghanistan with more than 11,000 lines, it operated on just over 2 acres of land. This was the same location the SSA occupied at the beginning of the war in 2001, when it only had 3,400 lines. For nearly 10 years, the demand for classes II (clothing and individual equipment), III (packaged petroleum, oils, and lubricants), IV (construction and barrier materials), and IX (repair parts) steadily increased, but the space allocated for this operation remained unchanged.

Because of the limited space, the SSA could not accept containers. All containers had to be unloaded at the CRP and the contents transported to the SSA. Daily, the SSA received an average of 80 wooden pallets from the CRP and 60 463L pallets from the arrival/departure airfield control group. All SSA-bound cargo had to be cleared off the flight line within 72 hours of arrival, so this cargo was the SSA's top priority for processing. The SSA cargo that arrived at the CRP by ground was second priority, making the backlog in the CRP increase significantly.

Personnel and Equipment Shortages

Another challenge we faced was a shortage of personnel and equipment. Our ICTC arrived in theater with less than half of its modified table of organization and equipment authorizations. Not only was the

ICTC required to operate the RSOI yard at Bagram, it also provided Soldiers and materials-handling equipment (MHE) at four additional FOBs. Supporting these FOBs further strained our ability to receive and ship cargo at Bagram.

The ICTC was directed to turn in its rough-terrain container handlers (RTCHs) to the Army Material Command reset program. These RTCHs were equipped with top handlers that could rotate 195 degrees clockwise and 105 degrees counterclockwise, which enabled the ICTC to maximize the limited amount of space in its yard and reduce the number of moves a RTCH needed to make to retrieve a container from a stack. The remaining RTCHs had a safety mechanism that limited the top handler's movement to 105 degrees clockwise and 45 degrees counterclockwise, ultimately reducing the efficiency in the RSOI yard.

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The contractor had a finite amount of MHE (six RTCHs, nine 10,000-pound forklifts, and four 4,000-pound forklifts), which was used to support the CRP and base operations. Because of competing requirements, the contractor's MHE was often diverted from CRP operations to other locations at the FOB. Not having dedicated contractor MHE adversely affected CRP operations.

The constant operation of this MHE and poor maintenance degraded its operational readiness rate, which also affected CRP operations. On many occasions, the ICTC had to shift MHE and personnel from the RSOI yard to the CRP to prevent an interruption in operations. The CRP also struggled with a high turnover rate in its management. In a 2-month period, the CRP had six different supervisors. This turnover adversely affected the momentum of the operation during this critical period.

Diverting Cargo

Because of the reduction in capabilities, we had to divert cargo to the commercial carrier holding yards in Kabul and monitor the flow, which resulted in the charge of carrier detention fees to the U.S. Government. Universal Service Contract 06, managed by the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, allocated 15 days for a container to move from

the seaport of debarkation to its final destination before it began to accrue detention fees of \$22 to \$92 per day. (Fees depended on the size of the container and whether it was a dry or reefer container.) The carriers also charged the Government a fee for storing containers in their yards.

Of greatest concern, diverting cargo to the carrier holding yards voided the carriers' requirement to meet the required delivery date. Failure to meet the required delivery date had the potential to adversely affect units' ability to execute their missions.

Creating a New CRSP

We quickly realized that we needed to change how we operated. With the assistance of Combined Joint Task Force 101, base operations, and the 82d and 101st Sustainment Brigades, we set out to develop a CRSP at Bagram Airfield capable of expanding and contracting with the flow of cargo.

The arduous task of creating a CRSP took most of our tour to accomplish. We had to clear out the clutter that had been accumulating for 9 years. To do this, we had to gain a better understanding of what we actually had in the yards. In the past, we had relied on internal spreadsheets to manage our inventory. With the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's assistance, the support operations staff and the ICTC became proficient at using the Integrated Booking System—Container Management Module, the Army's primary tool for container management in a deployed environment. This enabled us to know exactly what was in the yards and track detention.

We also developed a call log for contacting the cargo points of contact. Customers who failed to pick up within 30 days had their cargo turned over to the 82d and 101st Sustainment Brigades' mobile retrograde team. The mobile retrograde team inventoried these containers and returned their contents to the supply system.

Once we began to clear out frustrated cargo, we consolidated the RSOI yard and CRP personnel and MHE into one location. Our CRSP consisted of an inbound yard, an outbound yard, and an empty container collection point. We also pulled back some of our personnel and MHE from outlying FOBs. As the largest general supply hub in Afghanistan, we had no choice but to scale back our resources at these smaller FOBs.

We allocated M915/M872 tractor-trailer systems and palletized load systems from the battalion to assist in moving cargo to various nodes and customers at Bagram Airfield. This step was critical to freeing up space in the CRSP to receive more cargo from the Pakistan ground lines of communication.

To tackle carrier container detention fees, we transloaded the contents to Government-owned containers. Although this required double handling, transloading

reduced container detention significantly.

The sustainment brigades also erected a joint distribution management center (JDMC) in the CRSP. The JDMC provided customers with a one-stop shop to receive and schedule the onward movement of their cargo. Within the JDMC, the 17th CSSB had liaison officers to assist the customers with their cargo. Our presence in the JDMC was critical since we controlled the assets required to move cargo on and off of Bagram Airfield. This initiative vastly improved throughput.

THE GREATEST LESSON LEARNED FROM THIS EXPERIENCE IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CORs IN A CRSP OPERATED JOINTLY BY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ENTITIES.

Overcoming Challenges

The most challenging aspect of creating a CRSP was combining the operations of the ICTC and the contractors. Although the consolidation of the CRSP brought the ICTC and contractors together physically, they continued to operate independently.

To improve the operation, we realigned the contracting officer's representative (COR) responsibilities from the battalion to the ICTC. This forced both operations to work together. The ICTC also had the right skill set to know what the contractor was supposed to do to operate a CRSP effectively.

We assigned a COR and assistant COR to each contract for container, cargo, and yard operations and made this their sole function. Previously, CORs had been assigned to multiple contracts, but we found that this did not allow them to consistently evaluate the performance of each contractor. Assigning the ICTC as the COR for the contractors ensured greater oversight.

Although we realigned the COR responsibilities, our ICTC initially encountered challenges. The performance work statements contained in the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program IV contract were very vague and lacked performance metrics. However, the performance work statement stated that the contractor must follow certain Army regulations that govern container and yard operations. This allowed the ICTC to make the contractor improve its performance. Several of our CORs had experience operating CRSPs in Iraq, which proved invaluable as we worked to improve the infrastructure and cargo operations in Afghanistan.

Because of all of these efforts, we were able to increase the number of containers ingated from 30 to 150 per day. This, coupled with moving cargo out of

the CRSP, eliminated the need to divert cargo into the carrier holding yards. Cargo flowed freely into Bagram Airfield, saving more than \$800,000 in detention fees. Of greatest significance, units received their cargo by the required delivery rate.

Having the Contractor Take Over the CRSP

Toward the end of our tour, we realized that the CRSP was an operation that we could completely turn over to the contractor, which would enable us to reduce our logistics footprint. With Congress capping the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan at approximately 100,000 and potentially reducing it even further, eliminating the requirement for an ICTC would make room for additional combat troops.

Since the contractor was already conducting this operation, it did not seem that it would be too difficult for it to assume the ICTC's workload. However, the process proved to be somewhat complicated and lengthy to implement. We met with the contractor and the Defense Contract Management Agency numerous times to work out the details. We also had to submit letters of technical direction to the contractor before it would take on the ICTC's cargo mission.

Since the ICTC was critical to cargo transfer operations on four additional FOBs, we also had to assist the base operations and brigade support battalions at these locations in contracting out this function. Before the 17th CSSB departed from Afghanistan, the conditions were set to turn the CRSP over to the contractors and completely eliminate the requirement for an ICTC in RC-East.

The 17th CSSB's experience in Afghanistan serves as an example of how to establish a CRSP and increase throughput. The greatest lesson learned from this experience is the importance of CORs in a CRSP operated jointly by military and civilian entities. To be successful, units must select CORs with in-depth knowledge and experience in the contract they oversee. This must be a full-time position so CORs can be actively engaged with their contract and the operation on a daily basis. Anything less will lead to undesired results and have the potential to adversely affect operations.

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